

# Utah State Capitol Art, Architecture Restored

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By Ashley Evanson - 7 Jan 2008



*Photo by David Scott*

A view of the rotunda in the Utah State Capitol building. The Capitol was re-dedicated in a ceremony on Friday.

Once neglected and covered in years of grime, the State Capitol's art and architecture was cleaned and restored to its original beauty, and its completion was celebrated at the Capitol re-dedication ceremony Friday.

"I believe this is one of the finest preservation projects to have taken place in America," said Wilson Martin, state historic preservation officer. The renovation began exactly 100 months ago and has cost more than \$200 million.

The initial reason for renovation was for life safety. "We were aware there was a seismic problem," Martin said, which was solved with the installation of 285 base isolators underneath the Capitol. These isolators will allow flexibility and movement in the time of an earthquake.

But along with base isolators, the renovation committee decided to restore the artwork and design to its original splendor.

They used the journals and notes of original architect Richard Kletting to capture the vision of how he intended the Capitol to be. Extensive research on paint colors, lighting fixtures and sculpture design helped the team approach the renovation with a spirit of preservation for our past.

"Did Kletting have something to say to us?" Martin asked. "We decided early on to listen to our past. ...The refurbished Capitol is just a finished product of what it was intentionally intended to be."

Kletting wanted classical-style, allegorical figures to display in niches in the rotunda. The team commissioned four, heroic statues in the style he would have approved. "Science and Technology," "Arts and Education," "Land and Community" and "Immigration and Settlement" now stand majestically in the walls of the rotunda.

Murals, which cover the walls and ceilings, were once dark and dirty from almost 100 years of neglect. Some had even been painted over. But they too were restored to their original colors with an extensive, layered, cleaning process.

"I love the colors and the brightness that has come back," said Joseph Ligon, facilities coordinator, who has worked in the Capitol for more than 30 years. He has seen the condition of the art worsen over the years and is happy to see it returned to its beauty.

"The key is to preserve the authenticity of the art," said Judith McConkie, Capitol curator who has overseen the preservation. "[It's] taking care of an old building so that it doesn't pass away."

David Hart, the lead architect of the restoration, has found this project to be overwhelming, but incredible at the same time. When asked about the extensive cost of the project, he believed it all to be worth it.

"It's our culture; it's all about our heritage," Hart said. The people of Utah have history tied into the building. He said our grandfathers worked on its walls and to lose that is like losing a piece of our history.

Just like the Colosseum in Rome, or the Parthenon in Athens, are the cities' icons, representing all the history and art of its people, "It [the Capitol] is our culture; it's all about our heritage," Hart said.

When asked his favorite aspect of the restoration, Hart said, "I think the brilliance of the colors and the whole appearance of the building being taken back to its historic roots."

Along with artistic preservation, new lighting, technology, and video screens were added to improve the overall functionality. With a more functional building, "You end up with better government," Marin said.

The preservation committee hopes the new designs and improved old ones will invite the public to become more involved in Democracy.

Martin said, "When you have a place of governance where people can be [surrounded by] quality, I think it makes our government a better quality."